Henry Lawson, That There Dog O' Mine

Macquarie the shearer had met with an accident. To tell the truth, he had been in a drunken row at a wayside shanty, from which he had escaped with three fractured ribs, a cracked head, and various minor abrasions. His dog, Tally, had been a sober but savage participator in the drunken row, and had escaped with a broken leg. Macquarie afterwards shouldered his swag and staggered and struggled along the track ten miles to the Union Town hospital. Lord knows how he did it. He didn't exactly know himself. Tally limped behind all the way, on three legs.

The doctors examined the man's injuries and were surprised at his endurance. Even doctors are surprised sometimes - though they don't always show it. Of course they would take him in, but they objected to Tally. Dogs were not allowed on the premises.

"You will have to turn that dog out," they said to the shearer, as he sat on the edge of a bed.

Macquarie said nothing.

"We cannot allow dogs about the place, my man," said the doctor in a louder tone, thinking the man was deaf.

"Tie him up in the yard then."

"No. He must go out. Dogs are not permitted on the grounds."

Macquarie rose slowly to his feet, shut his agony behind his set teeth, painfully buttoned his shirt over his hairy chest, took up his waistcoat, and staggered to the corner where the swag lay.

"What are you going to do?" they asked.

"You ain't going to let my dog stop?"

"No. It's against the rules. There are no dogs allowed on premises."

He stooped and lifted his swag, but the pain was too great, and he leaned back against the wall.

"Come, come now! man alive!" exclaimed the doctor, impatiently. "You must be mad. You know you are not in a fit state to go out. Let the wardsman help you to undress."

"No!" said Macquarie. "No. If you won't take my dog in you don't take me. He's got a broken leg and wants fixing up just - just as much as - as I do. If I'm good enough to come in, he's good enough - and - and better."

He paused awhile, breathing painfully, and then went on.

"That - that there old dog of mine has follered me faithful and true, these twelve long hard and hungry years. He's about - about the only thing that ever cared whether I lived or fell and rotted on the cursed track."

He rested again; then he continued: "That - that there dog was pupped on the track," he said, with a sad sort of a smile. "I carried him for months in a billy, and afterwards on my swag when he knocked up....And the old slut - his mother - she'd foller along quite contented - and sniff the billy now and again - just to see if he was all right....She follered me for God knows how many years. She follered me till she was blind - and for a year after. She follered me till she could crawl along through the dust no longer, and - and then I killed her, because I couldn't leave her behind alive!"

He rested again.

"And this here old dog," he continued, touching Tally's upturned nose with his knotted fingers, "this here old dog has follered me for - for ten years; through floods and droughts, through fair times and - and hard - mostly hard; and kept me from going mad when I had no mate nor money on the lonely track; and watched over me for weeks when I was drunk - drugged and poisoned at the cursed shanties; and saved my life more'n once, and got kicks and curses very often for thanks; and forgave me for it all; and - and fought for me. He was the only living thing that stood up for me against that crawling push of curs when they set onter me at the shanty back yonder - and he left his mark on some of 'em too; and - and so did I."

He took another spell.

Then he drew in his breath, shut his teeth hard, shouldered his swag, stepped into the doorway, and faced round again.

The dog limped out of the corner and looked up anxiously.

"That there dog," said Macquarie to the hospital staff in general, "is a better dog than I'm a man - or you too, it seems - and a better Christian. He's been a better mate to me than I ever was to any man - or any man to me. He's watched over me; kep' me from getting robbed many a time; fought for me; saved my life and took drunken kicks and curses for thanks - and forgave me. He's been a true, straight, honest, and faithful mate to me - and I ain't going to desert him now. I ain't going to kick him out in the road with a broken leg. I - Oh, my God! my back!"

He groaned and lurched forward, but they caught him, slipped off the swag, and laid him on a bed.

Half an hour later the shearer was comfortably fixed up.

"Where's my dog!" he asked, when he came to himself.

"Oh, the dog's all right," said the nurse, rather impatiently. "Don't bother. The doctor's setting his leg out in the yard."

**Questions**

1. Find out what a swag and a shanty are.

2. What work does a shearer do? How would this affect his lifestyle?

3. Which parts of the story suggest that working class Australians are fairly rough people? Give some details of their typical behaviour and include a quotation from the story.

4. Why is Macquarie prepared to leave if his dog can’t stay? Include a quotation in your answer.

5. What are the things that people value in this story?

6. How can we tell that the doctor’s attitude is changed by Macquarie’s story? What does the ending show us about what he is like as a person?